

## **REMARKS**

In response to the above Office Action, claims 1 and 3 have been amended to more clearly claim Applicants' invention and distinguish it from the cited prior art. More specifically, the claims have been amended to recite that the claimed process is one "consisting essentially of" bringing methane into contact with a metal catalyst to produce ethane to clearly eliminate the presence of other alkanes as a starting or initial alkane and to make it clear that only methane is being used. An RCE is being filed with this Reply to enable the Examiner to consider the amended claims at this time.

It is believed that the above amendments to claims 1 and 3 avoid the Examiner's rejection of the claims under 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph, because the claims now "eliminate other alkane [alkanes] to be used as initial alkanes." Withdrawal of the rejection under §112, first paragraph is therefore requested.

In the Office Action, the Examiner continues to reject claims 1-6 and 8-20 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) for being anticipated by Basset, presumably on the grounds that the claims as then written did not exclude the presence of alkanes, other than methane, as a starting or initial alkane.

It is believed that with the above amendments to claims 1 and 3 which do just that, the claims, and claims 2, 4-6 and 8-20 dependent therefrom should no longer be anticipated by Basset. As pointed out in the Reply filed November 13, 2007, Basset only discloses a process where methane with at least one other starting alkane (A) is contacted with a metal catalyst. The other starting alkane (A) comprises at least two carbon atoms. See, page 3, lines 7-10 and lines 14-16 of Basset. The reference never discloses or suggests contacting only methane as an initial alkane with a metal catalyst

for producing ethane as set forth in claims 1 and 3, but rather requires at least two alkanes. This is now excluded by Applicants' claims.

Withdrawal of Basset as a ground of rejection of the claims under §102(b) is therefore requested.

It is believed claims 1-6 and 8-20 are now in condition for allowance.

Please grant any extensions of time required to enter this response and charge any additional required fees to Deposit Account 06-0916.

Respectfully submitted,

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